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Memories

(Episode 21)

Teaching Arabic Literature

Since childhood, I had a keen interest and affinity for poetry and literature. In view of this, whichever class I would be teaching *Sarf* (Arabic morphology) and *Nahw* (Arabic grammar), *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) or any other subject, I would invariably be assigned to teach Arabic literature to the class one year ahead of them. Thus when *Maqamat Hariri* was allocated to me, though I was not fond of its *musajja'* (rhyming prose) and affectedly rhyming style, I nevertheless worked very hard in teaching it, because it contains a great treasure of Arabic vocabulary and idioms. While preparing for its lessons, I would not only refer to every commentary from "*Sharishi*" to "*Ifaadaat*", rather for researching its semantics I would also directly reference lexicons, and would also save all my notes in a notebook. However, I would only present to the students what they were capable of digesting. Especially while teaching the application of words I would cite verses of the Quran, and sometimes Arabic idioms. After that, I taught "*Deewan Mutanabbi*", "*Sab' Mu'allaqat*" and "*Deewan Hamasa*" with the same zeal and enthusiasm. "*Akbari*" the commentary of "*Mutanabbi*", and "*Zozani*" the commentary of "*Sab' Muallaqat*" and "*Hamasa*" were my constant references. Together with "*Hamasa*", I tried to keep "*Mufaddaliyaat*" among my references, so that the poetic taste of those times could be kept in view.

Before beginning the lessons of "*Maqamat*", when I perused various books regarding the introduction to the knowledge of literature, I came across a saying that Arabic literature has four pillars: "*Al-Bayaan Wat-Tabyeen*" of Al-Jaahiz, "*Al-Kaamil*" of Al-Mubarrad, "*Adab Al-Kaatib*" of Ibn-Qutayba and "*Al-Amaali*" of Abu Ali Al-Qaali. Among these, the third and fourth books were not available in Darul Uloom's library in those days, but the first two were available, and I would do a *leisurely* reading of those two in my free time. Besides these I found "*Al-'Iqd Al-Fareed*" of Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi in the library, which I liked more than both of the above books because it contains excellent selections of Arabic prose, poetry, and speeches. Thereafter I would refer to it often. On the topic of *Usool Al-Lughah* (principles of linguistics), I liked *Allamah* Jalaluddin Suyooti's (may Allah's mercy be upon him) book "*Al-Muzhir*" and benefited greatly from it as well. I bought Ibn Rasheeq's "*Al-'Umdah*" and 'Askari's "*Kitab Us-Sana'atayn*" from a junk dealer. Their perusal also used to be quite pleasurable.

Besides these, I was also interested in reading modern Arabic literature, and would also read the writings of Hazrat Maulana Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi (may Allah's mercy be upon him), Shakeeb Arsalan, Abbas Mahmood Al-Aqqaad, Manfaluti, Shaykh Mustafa As-Siba'i (may Allah's mercy be upon him) and others with interest as well.

Introduction to the Knowledge of Literature

Before starting the lessons of any book, the teacher customarily gives a definition of that branch of knowledge, its subject of discussion, its aims and objectives, and also its brief history as an introduction. For all other branches of knowledge, their introduction is generally found at the beginning of the books dealing with it. But for literature, I could not find such a systematic and comprehensive introduction. I was not satiated with whatever is written at the beginning of “*Maqamat*” with regards to this. For this reason, I got the idea to write an introduction to the knowledge of literature myself, and to include the gist of the above-mentioned books in that introduction in such a manner that a description of the various types of literature and their brief history becomes clear. I therefore penned down this introduction in Arabic with great zeal and zest, in which I presented, besides the definition of *adab* (literature), the reason for its so being named and its aims and objects, I also divided it into two parts: prose and poetry. Thereafter I listed the various types of prose, which included *mukalamah* (dialogue), *khutbat* (speeches), *maktoobat* (letters), *maqaalah* (essays), *tawqee’aat*, etc. And for each type, I also described how its style evolved over different times, and also cited examples to elucidate this. Similarly in the section on poetry, I began by describing how poetry began. Thereafter I introduced the various types of poetry, and besides *Qaseedah*, *Ghazal* and *Rajaz*, it also included an introduction to the Andalusian “*Muwashshahaat*” and “*Ajzaal*”. Thereafter I introduced the various eras of Arab poets, including *Jahileen*, *Mukhdarimeen*, *Islamiyyin* and *Mawlidiyyin*, and pointed out their peculiarities, and also cited a selection from each type. Consequently, this had become a comprehensive book which I dearly kept in a file, and continued revising it during my teaching years.

One day I received news that Hazrat Maulana Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi (may Allah’s mercy be upon him) was visiting Karachi. I wished to present this endeavour of mine to Hazrat, with the intention of improving it. And if nothing else, the mere falling of Hazrat’s gaze on it would be a blessing in itself for me. I thus went to visit Hazrat, taking the file along. Hazrat very kindly scanned through it, and as far as I remember, also bestowed encouraging words regarding it. I was aware that Hazrat remained very busy, so I did not request him to write a *Taqreedh*¹ for it. Hazrat’s mere looking at it was a source of blessing for me. However, a shiver runs down my spine every time I recall the tragedy that followed. What happened next is that in my return taxi, I had to bring back a relative to our house. She had a lot of luggage with her. When we reached home I became so engrossed in unloading her things that I completely forgot the file I had put behind the seat. Consequently, all things were unloaded, but my file which contained the manuscript of that book was left in the taxi. And the taxi went off. It was when the taxi went beyond my reach that I remembered the file. And I could do nothing except crying over spilt milk. Thereafter I tried all means possible at the time to locate the taxi, and perhaps also placed an advertisement in the newspaper. But neither was it destined for me to find it, nor did I find it. ما شاء الله (Whatever Allah wishes takes place, and whatever He does not desire, does not occur). The age of computers and photocopying had not arrived yet, so that a copy of the manuscript could be made and kept protected. The result was that the effort of a long time was lost.

Anyway, Allah desired for this book of mine not to become public, and definitely there was some benefit in this happening.

¹ Translator: A favourable review added as a prologue to a book

Arabic Speeches

I was used to delivering speeches in Arabic during my student life thanks to my Syrian teachers, especially Ustadh Ahmadul Ahmad. Thus, whenever a guest would be visiting Darul Uloom I would be told to give a welcome speech for them in Arabic. It was during those days, in *Jamadal Oola* 1382H (circa October 1962), that the famous Syrian scholar Hazrat Shaikh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah (may Allah's mercy be upon him) came for a visit during his first tour of Pakistan. Our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) had met him during his tour of Syria, and he had mentioned Shaikh in highly praising words in the letter he sent us from Syria. I was immediately fascinated by his personality when I was blessed with spending some time in his company on this occasion. As usual, I was told to give a welcome speech for him when he visited Darul Uloom. Besides welcoming him I had also described, in a somewhat emotional fashion, the backdrop in which Darul Uloom Deoband was founded, as well the services rendered by the senior scholars of India. At this, Hazrat wrote the following words, for my encouragement, in Darul Uloom's guestbook:

"لقد كان من فصاحة الأخ الحبيب في الله الشيخ محمد تقي العثماني ما كشف عن تقصير العرب في لغتهم"

(Gazette of Darul Uloom Karachi, 1380H to 1382H, Page 26)

"My brother Shaikh Muhammad Taqi Usmani, whom I love for the sake of Allah, his eloquence was such that it manifested to the Arabs themselves their weakness in their own language."

This note was definitely meant for encouragement of his young student, in which he did not consider exaggeration to be blameworthy. But it is a fact that I received extraordinary graces from him during this visit. Wherever he went, I would try to stay with him, translate his talks into Urdu, and would greatly benefit from his scholarly discourses. To such an extent that at one point he said to me: "لو كنت تفاحةً" "لأكلتك". Meaning: "If you were an apple, I would eat you." Thereafter he gave me the title of تفاحة الهند (The apple of India and Pakistan), and also prefixed my name with this title in a book of his ('*At-Tasreeh*'). I have given an account, in some detail, about our relationship in the section about him in "*Nuqoosh-e-Raftagan*". And some more will details come later InshaAllah. May Allah the Most High have infinite mercy upon him.

Besides *Nahw* and *Sarf*, Alhamdulillah I got the opportunity to teach books of all subjects traditionally taught to students in Madrasas, including *Balaghah* (eloquence), *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), *Faraid* (law of inheritance), *Mantiq* (logic), philosophy and *Kalaam* (theology). As a result, I got the opportunity to teach all books of the *Dars-e-Nizami* curriculum over the years, except three. One was "*Mukhtasar Al-Ma'ani*", the second was "*Sullam Ul-Uloom*" and the third was "*Meebazi*". However, for *Balaghah* (eloquence) I continued teaching "*Duroos Al-Balaghah*" and "*Al-Balaghah Al-Wadihah*", and for *Mantiq* (logic) I could only reach until "*Sharh Tahzeeb*" and "*Qutb*". I did not get to teach "*Sharh Aqa'id*" as a formal lesson, but for some reason Maulana Iftikhar Ahmad Sahab (who *MashaAllah* teaches Sahih Muslim at Darul Uloom at this time) had missed its lesson, so I taught him a part of it outside scheduled classes.

Travel to East Pakistan, 27 January 1961

At the beginning of 1961 I happened to visit East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) for the first time, together with my respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him). A pious wealthy individual of Sylhet, respected Majd Ud-Deen Sahab (may Allah's mercy be upon him), had been writing to our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) for a long time that Sylhet had remained a focal point of attention of senior scholars of Deoband. Also, Hazrat Maulana Sayyid Husain Ahmad Sahab Madani (may Allah's mercy be upon him) had made prolonged stays here several times. Furthermore, the second student of Hazrat Shaikhul Hind (may his secret be sanctified), Hazrat Maulana Sahool Usmani Sahab, had also stayed here for a long time, and the people of Sylhet have a great taste for benefitting from pious personalities in this manner. We thus desire that you should visit Sylhet. We do not intend ceremonial rallies or public gatherings, rather we wish for you to stay here for a few weeks during which people will benefit from your company according to their convenience. At long last, our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) decided to undertake this journey for two weeks in January 1961, and what was extremely thrilling for me was that he expressed his desire for me to accompany him. This was in the month of Shaban (1380H) and our academic year was coming to an end, so there was no detriment for being absent from Darul Uloom. I had heard a lot about the state of affairs in Bengal and was enthusiastic to witness it myself. I was so exhilarated at this unexpected journey in our respected father's company that I still remember that feeling of being overjoyed. Consequently, we departed on this memorable journey on the morning of 27 June. A student of our respected father's, Maulana Jameel Ahmad Sahab Akyabi, who at the time was a copier of Fatawa at Darul Ifta and would also copy our respected father's letters and speeches, was also together on this journey. This was my first long flight since the short flight from Jeddah to Madinah Munawwarah in 1951 (which was during my childhood). I was in the eighteenth year of my life, so besides the real thrill of spending some time in our respected father's company and looking forward to sightseeing in Bengal, the flight itself was also exciting for me. Jetliners had not come in vogue by then, so our flight was on a Super Constellation plane with propellers. It did not fly higher than ten or eleven thousand feet, so the ground could be seen from its windows. Throughout the flight, I watched the world below from the window, first Sindh then India. I still remember seeing the confluence of rivers at Allahabad, then Bhopal, and then Kolkatta extending till far. When we finally reached Dhaka after a flight of around five-and-a-half hours, I saw a huge crowd waiting to receive our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him). Hazrat Maulana Mufti Muhyi ud-Deen Sahab (may Allah's mercy be upon him) was an especially devoted student of our respected father. We stayed at his Madrasa Ashraf ul Uloom which is located in "*Bara Kutra*" locality of Dhaka. The principal of this Madrasa was famously known as "*Pir Ji Huzoor*", and in his piety was considered the most senior scholar in Bengal and was counted amongst the *Ahlullah* (people close of Allah) of the region. I got the opportunity to visit him. We spent the next day in Dhaka itself and visited the Madrasa at Lalbagh, where we visited Hazrat Maulana Shamsul Haq Sahab Fareedpuri and Hazrat Maulana Ahmadullah Sahab (who was famously known as Hafiz Ji Huzoor). From Sylhet, respected Majd Ud-Deen Sahab's son or daughter's father-in-law, who was himself a big Nawab of that region, had personally come to Dhaka to fetch our respected father. And the manager of the library of Madrasa Aaliya Sylhet, Maulana Tafazzul Ali Sahab, had also come with him, with whom I later developed very frank relations. We departed for Sylhet by train after Isha, and spent the night in a First Class compartment of the train. When I woke up early the next morning, the train had stopped at Kalaura Station. The remaining journey of a few hours was spent watching the lush and verdant sceneries from the window. There is one thing

about Maulana Tafazzul Ali Sahab which I remember to this day. An attendant of Nawab Sahab was accompanying him and was travelling in another compartment. When it was time to fold up the beddings the next morning, Nawab Sahab waited for the next station so that the attendant could come and fold them. When Maulana Tafazzul Ali Sahab saw the beddings still spread out, he proceeded to fold them up himself. Nawab Sahab said: "Leave them. A person will come in a while and fold them." Maulana Tafazzul Ali Sahab replied: "I am also a person." And thereafter folded all the beddings by himself. The lesson learned from this sentence is that if one can do a task by oneself, why delay it in wait of the attendant?

Such a huge crowd had come to receive our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) at Sylhet station that it was difficult to walk through. I had heard about respected Majd Ud-Deen Sahab that he was a wealthy personality of this area. But when I met him the first time, his outlook and attire gave the impression of an extremely humble and pious elder, and his appearance would remind me of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Emperor of India. He had done M.A from Aligarh University and was a friend of the then-President of Pakistan, the late General Muhammad Ayub Khan Sahab. And Ayub Khan Sahab would stay at his house whenever he visited Sylhet. He took us to his house which was then called "Phool Bari House". The skin of a lion, which he had himself hunted, hung in the drawing room. Our respected father stayed in an external room of this beautiful house. This house was situated in the "*Dargah Mahalla*" locality of Sylhet, which was located near the grave and Masjid of Hazrat Shah Jalal Mujarrad al-Yemeni (may Allah's mercy be upon him). It is narrated about Hazrat Shah Jalal Mujarrad al-Yemeni (may Allah's mercy be upon him) that he had come here from Yemen. His status as a pious personality in this region was similar to the status of Hazrat Khwaja Mueen ud-Deen Sahab Chishti Ajmeri (may Allah's mercy be upon him) in India.

The late Majd Ud-Deen Sahab's house was situated in a rather lush and pleasant area. He treated us with such appreciation, detail-orientedness towards our preferences, and courteousness, that the deep impression of his hospitality remains till today. His son, the late Muhyi us-Sunnah Sahab, was a young man at the time, and would take care of all our travel and other arrangements. Considering my young age, two young men would take special care to entertain me. One of them was Maulana Tafazzul Ali Sahab and the other was respected Najabat Ali Sahab, who was responsible for "*Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu*" (Organization for the Promotion of Urdu Language). He was quite interested in learning Urdu idioms, and would take me to nearby areas every morning. Sylhet is dotted with small green hills which are called "*Teela*" there. After Fajr, we would go sightseeing to some *Teela* and enjoy the natural landscapes. Sylhet used to be part of Assam at some time, and from here Assam's Khasi and Jaintia Hills can be seen in the horizon, draped in mist. The Surma river, which flows to Sylhet, has its source at those very mountains, and the city is populated across both sides of the river. We would sometimes visit the bridge over it for sightseeing.

Lailat ul-Bara'ah (the night of fifteenth of Shaban) occurred during our stay, and we saw the bizarre scene of caravans of people flocking towards the grave of Hazrat Shah Jalal Sahab (may Allah's mercy be upon him) with their beddings, not only from Sylhet city but also nearby villages and distant cities. Not only was the Masjid and its courtyard packed to the brim, people had spread their beddings even on the adjacent streets and roads till far. All these people had come to spend *Lailat ul-Bara'ah* at the Masjid

next to the grave, and they could not number less than two or two-and-a-half hundred thousand. We came to know that this happens here every year at *Lailat ul-Bara'ah*.

Our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) stayed in Sylhet for around two weeks. His *majlis*¹ (gathering) would take place twice every day, which scholars and lay people of the area would attend. During this time, a large number of people established *Islahi Ta'alluq*² with our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) and some also became *Baiyah* to him. Hazrat Maulana Sahool Usmani Sahab was a special student of Hazrat Shaykhul Hind, and stayed in Sylhet for a very long time. (Majd Ud-Deen Sahab had stayed in his company for a long time, the signs of which were evident in his personality.) Hazrat Maulana Sahool Usmani Sahab's son, Maulana Mahmood Sahab, would visit our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) daily and would quench his spiritual thirst through his *majalis* (gatherings), and eventually became *Baiyah* to our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him). Our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) was staying in our house at Lasbela House in those days, while we two brothers would stay at Darul Uloom due to our duties there. As a result, I seldom got the opportunity to benefit from our respected father's (may Allah's mercy be upon him) *Islahi* gatherings. Alhamdulillah, Allah Ta'ala gave this opportunity during this journey.

Hazrat Maulana Akbar Ali Sahab (may Allah's mercy be upon him) was the *Imam* of the Jami Masjid of *Dargah Mahalla*. He was an extremely humble and simple elder, and owing to his utterly unembellished appearance and unpretentious demeanour, one would not even assume that he could be a scholar. Every aspect of his persona radiated utter innocence. He would bring tea for our respected father every day at *Tahajjud* time. It was during this stay that our respected father suggested to him to start a Madrasa next to the Masjid. He thus established Madrasa Qasimul Uloom, which is today counted amongst the distinguished Madrasas of Bangladesh.

Respected Majd Ud-Deen Sahab owned four tea farms in Sylhet and neighbouring areas. He took our respected father to two of them to spend one night in each. It was my first time seeing tea farms. But these were not ordinary farms. In fact they were entire estates spread across miles. Each farm contained its own factory and a magnificent bungalow. And the truth of the matter is that I had never before seen any farms which were as well-organized, scenic and beautiful as these. And of their type, perhaps never after as well. Keeping in view our respected father's (may Allah's mercy be upon him) comfort, Majd Ud-Deen Sahab had not scheduled any public talks. But a big Madrasa in a village near the border of India was having its Annual Day. They sent an invitation to our respected father, which he accepted. The journey to that village involved travelling over the river Surma. For this, Majd Ud-Deen Sahab arranged for a beautiful and comfortable boat, which took us to our destination in about two hours. The crowd at the Annual Day was so massive that only heads could be seen as far as the eye could reach. A majority of them were scholars and students of Madrasas. Our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) delivered an approximately one-hour long speech, and I remember that after reciting the *Khutba* and before beginning his talk, he recited the following couplet:

¹ Translator: A gathering where a Shaikh (mentor) gives advice regarding reformation of morals and actions

² Translator: A mutual agreement between a Shaikh (mentor) and a seeker in which the seeker would seek advice from the Shaikh for his *Islah* (moral reformation) without formally becoming *Baiyah* to the Shaikh at this point

امیر جمع ہیں احباب، درد دل کہ لے
پھر اجتماع دل دوستان رہے، نہ رہے

Translation:

O Ameer! Friends are gathered, pour your heart out,

This gathering of friends may come again, or not

Thereafter he especially highlighted the matters pertaining to students and teachers of religious knowledge which needed rectification.

Anyway! This stay at Sylhet proved to be very beneficial, interesting and memorable. We returned home shortly before Ramadan.

I got the opportunity to visit Sylhet one more time with our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him), but that time the stay was shorter.